

# Random Encounters

## Monsters of the Moon

By Eric Haddock



### Rat Pack

The village of Dark Stone has, like any other town out in the wilderness, a rat problem. It has never been too bad -- certainly not bad enough to send someone for help -- but it is there. Residents have to be careful not to leave food out at night and be vigilant about keeping a good mouser cat on hand.

Unknown to the villagers, a pack of moonrats moved in to Dark Stone to join their feral companions. Last month, during the full moon, the lunar light swelled their intellects and they became aware that Dark Stone had gotten complacent about the rat problem. It was almost bad enough for the humanoids to make a concentrated effort but not quite yet. This was the window of opportunity the moonrats lived for. Before the night was over, they had made their plans. At the next full moon, they would strike from surprise and, with their numbers, bring the village down and feast on the juicy treasures that would be theirs.

At the next full moon, the moonrats' Intelligence scores will swell to 10. Fortunately for them, the night of the next full moon is like the three nights previous: crystal clear with no clouds.

During the nights leading up to the full moon, the moonrats have been preparing for their night of horror. Nibbling part way through ropes, almost breaching walls down by the floor, digging tunnels from building to building, stealing small objects -- everything necessary for them to put their plan into action.



**Moon Rats:** hp 1; see *Monster Manual II* page 151.

### Plan

The goal for the moonrats is simple: destruction. While other packs of moonrats seek to spread only terror and disease, this pack is led by He Who Pierces, a moonrat with exceptionally sharp teeth and the determination and charisma to lead the pack. His plan is to destroy as much of Dark Stone as possible in a single night, and then after that he intends to menace the humanoids when they are most vulnerable and without shelter.

The primary means for the destruction is going to be fire. Every lantern sitting on every table in Dark Stone is going to be overturned and the oil set aflame.

### Execution

The PCs may be staying overnight in Dark Stone for any number of reasons. Perhaps they're recuperating from a difficult battle earlier in the day, or perhaps they're just passing through and needed a rest at the local inn. Either way, the quiet night is broken by multiple -- and simultaneous -- cries of "Fire!"

He Who Pierces' plan begins smoothly. With all the rats in place and attacking at the same time, thwarting the destruction of the village is going to be extremely difficult. The only way to do it is for everyone to realize that the rats are suddenly intelligent and working against the villagers.

Coming to this realization may be easy. It takes a successful Spot check (DC 15) to note that some of the rats are clearly communicating with each other almost like humanoids do. They even gesticulate in an intelligent way. Additionally, many are carrying things in their mouths and acting in a manner unusual for instinct-driven rats. The people most likely to notice this are the adventurers, since the villagers are quite preoccupied with saving their homes and buildings from fire.

Another instance that can provide PCs with a clue as to what they're dealing with involves the temple. First of all, it's not on fire, and, secondly, the roof seems to be moving. A successful Spot check (DC 15) shows that the roof is nearly carpeted with rats, and dozens of rats are streaming up and down its walls.

The PCs may want to help with the fires, but they may not have the ability to do so. (The fires the rats start are by necessity, fairly small, and the PCs can easily put them out. However, more fires and other destructive events keep happening until the PCs deal with the rats.) As a result, their best option is to concentrate on the rats -- and on He Who Pierces if they can.

Once the PCs realize that the rats are coordinated, they may come to the conclusion that a rat should be

leading the assault on Dark Stone. (If not, a successful Wilderness Lore check (DC 10) can point this out to them.) Thus, He Who Pierces becomes the most wanted rat in the village.

Finding He Who Pierces can be accomplished only by capturing and interrogating a moonrat since He Who Pierces does not distinguish himself in any way that a nonrat would recognize. The rats are loyal to whoever is in charge and won't give up information easily. How the PCs extract He Who Pierces' whereabouts is up to the PCs.

He Who Pierces is hiding out atop the tallest structure in Dark Stone: the temple. This may be obvious from the situation, but discovering which rat in that teeming mass is He Who Pierces is another matter. From atop the temple, He Who Pierces can see the village easily and issue orders to runners to try to counter the efforts of the humanoids.

### **The Battle**

Fighting He Who Pierces may be difficult because of its location on the roof of the temple. A successful Climb check (DC 20) is needed to ascend to He Who Pierces' level. Anyone who appears on the roof of the temple is swarmed by 2d10 moonrats. Since the rats are intelligent, they try to coordinate their attacks to maximum effect. If possible, they try to trip humanoids off the roof. If not, they bite, claw, and tear the humanoid down.

Destructive area spells are not welcome given the nature of the building. Aside from risking the wrath of the god whose temple it is, there is the practical matter that with so many buildings on fire, an intact building capable of holding many people at once is going to be a critical building in Dark Stone's recovery. It has to remain standing and avoid as much damage as possible.

If the PCs kill He Who Pierces, the resolve of the moonrats wavers and they become uncoordinated, though they are still intelligent. This can be the turning point that allows the villagers to get the upper hand on the destruction of their village.

### **Bringing the Parts Together**

This random encounter can be used any time the PCs visit a village or town anywhere. Moonrats are essentially invisible foes, since they're rarely taken too seriously. They're free to scuttle about carrying out their twisted plans in plain sight, shielded by the impression that rats aren't intelligent or clever enough to amount to anything.

However, a good time to introduce this threat is the night after the battle in the previous random encounter, while the PCs are recovering.

### **Coming in Part 3 of Monsters of the Moon**

The results of unending stress take many forms. See what can happen in a community besieged by ongoing stressful occurrences, and then see what creature takes advantage of the situation.

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